

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BONN 14819 01 OF 03 190952Z

12

ACTION EUR-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5128

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BONN 14819

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, GW

SUBJECT: THE SCHMIDT CHANCELLORSHIP AFTER FOUR MONTHS:
AN ASSESSMENT.

SUMMARY: IT HAS SEEMED TO ME DESIRABLE, SOME FOUR
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PAGE 02 BONN 14819 01 OF 03 190952Z

MONTHS AFTER HELMUT SCHMIDT'S ACCESSION TO THE

CHANCELLORSHIP, TO ATTEMPT AN ASSESSMENT OF HIS PERFORMANCE SO FAR AND OF THE MAJOR DIFFICULTIES CONFRONTING HIM.

SCHMIDT HAS CLEARLY PROJECTED HIMSELF AS AN AGGRESSIVE AND DECISIVE CHANCELLOR WHO KNOWS WHAT HE WANTS FOR GERMANY, THE SPD AND FOR HIMSELF, AND WHO KNOWS HOW TO ACHIEVE HIS AIMS. HIS NEW STYLE OF ACTIVE, SOMETIMES ALMOST AUTHORITARIAN LEADERSHIP, BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD, STANDS IN MARKED CONTRAST TO THE LETHARGIC LAST FEW YEARS OF BRANDT'S CHANCELLORSHIP AND SEEMS ATTRACTIVE TO CONSERVATIVES, MODERATES AND LIBERALS ALIKE. HIS MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD, PRAGMATIC, NON-DOCTRINAIRE STAND ON MOST ISSUES STRIKES A RESPONSIVE CORD WITH THE BULK OF THE GERMAN PUBLIC. SCHMIDT HAS SO FAR MADE FEW MISTAKES, BUT THE FUTURE IS NOT WITHOUT SERIOUS PROBLEMS. THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC SITUATION, INFLATION CUM UNEMPLOYMENT AT HOME, SCANDALS AND CONFLICTS WITHIN THE SPD, THE SEEMINGLY GROWING STRAIN IN RELATIONS WITH THE FDP, THE SPD'S COALITION PARTNER, AND WITH ITS LEADER GENSCHER -- ALL OF THESE ARE PROBLEMS THAT SCHMIDT IS GOING TO HAVE TO COPE WITH IN THE COMING WEEKS AND MONTHS. ASSUMING HIS CONTINUING GOOD HEALTH, I WOULD NEVERTHELESS FAVORABLY ASSESS HIS PROSPECTS OF MAINTAINING AN ATTRACTIVE LEADERSHIP IMAGE. HE WILL, HOWEVER, NOT FIND THE GOING EASY.

HIS ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES IS ESSENTIALLY FRIENDLY, BUT HE CAN SOMETIMES BE CRITICAL (PRIVATELY AND OCCASIONALLY PUBLICLY) WHEN HE CONSIDERS US TO BE PURSUING POLICIES OR TAKING ACTIONS NOT IN GERMAN OR EUROPEAN INTERESTS. SCHMIDT'S BASIC AWARENESS OF THE KEY U.S. SECURITY AND ECONOMIC/MONETARY ROLE IN EUROPE AND THE WORLD IS OVERRIDING, HOWEVER, AND THE US/EUROPEAN RELATIONSHIP SHOULD BENEFIT FROM THE PRAGMATIC IF SOMEWHAT MORE ASSERTIVE GERMAN ROLE IN EUROPE. END SUMMARY.

1. WHEN SCHMIDT TOOK OVER AS CHANCELLOR LAST MAY, MOST OBSERVERS EXPECTED HIM TO TAKE CHARGE QUICKLY AND DECISIVELY. HE HAS NOT DISAPPOINTED THEM. THE PRESENT SNAPPY ATMOSPHERE IN BONN CONTRASTS WITH CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BONN 14819 01 OF 03 190952Z

THAT PREVAILING LAST SPRING, WHEN BRANDT WAS ONLY GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS OF LEADERSHIP. SCHMIDT HAS SET OUT VERY CONSCIOUSLY, TO PROJECT THE IMAGE OF AN AGGRESSIVE, DETERMINED AND COMPETENT LEADER, PREPARED TO TAKE HARD-HEADED DECISIONS. HE HAS CONTINUED HIS DIRECT, EVEN OUTSPOKEN, APPROACH TO POLITICS, BOTH FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC. HE GIVES THE IMPRESSION OF KNOWING WHAT HE WANTS FOR GERMANY, THE SPD AND HIMSELF AND OF KNOWING

HOW TO ACHIEVE IT. THE END EFFECT IS THE FEELING, AT LEAST IN BONN POLITICAL CIRCLES, THAT THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC AT LAST HAS A CHANCELLOR WHO UNDERSTANDS HIS ROLE AS LEADER OF A POWERFUL COUNTRY WILLING TO USE ITS POWER TO FURTHER NATIONAL AND ALLIANCE INTERESTS.

2. SCHMIDT HAS BEEN RELATIVELY SUCCESSFUL SO FAR IN THE DOMESTIC ECONOMIC SPHERE, CONTINUING THE ANTI-INFLATIONARY POLICIES HE PURSUED AS FINANCE MINISTER. UNDER HIS LEADERSHIP THE GOVERNMENT AND THE BUNDESBANK HAVE PULLED TOGETHER MORE SMOOTHLY THAN UNDER MOST OF HIS PREDECESSORS. SCHMIDT HAS NOT, HOWEVER, PUSHED THROUGH ANY SIGNIFICANT DOMESTIC REFORMS IN HIS FIRST MONTHS, RATHER ALLOWING ORIGINAL DRAFTS OF EGISLATION TO CONTINUE THEIR MEASURED WAY THROUGH INTRA-PARTY, INTER-

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PAGE 01 BONN 14819 02 OF 03 190959Z

12

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 BONN 14819

PARTY AND PARLIAMENTARY CONSIDERATION. BUT IN DOING SO,
HE HAS MADE CLEAR THAT HE KNOWS WHAT HE IS UP TO AND
THAT ALL THAT IS HAPPENING IS TAKING PLACE UNDER HIS
GUIDING HAND.
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PAGE 02 BONN 14819 02 OF 03 190959Z

3. ABROAD, SCHMIDT HAS MOVED MORE AGGRESSIVELY. THE
LOAN TO ITALY, HIS BILATERALS WITH GISCARD, HIS CONTACTS
WITH THE GREEKS, ARABS, AND THIRD WORLD LEADERS HAVE ALL
GIVEN THE IMPRESSION OF A GERMAN CHANCELLOR IN COMMAND
OF FRG FOREIGN POLICY WITH AN ENHANCED ROLE TO PLAY IN
WESTERN EUROPE. ONE COULD EVEN SAY (AND MANY IN BONN
ARE DOING SO) THAT HIS RECENT ITALIAN-FRENCH VENTURES
WERE AT LEAST IN PART DESIGNED TO SHOW EUROPE, BOTH
EAST AND WEST, THAT THE FRG IS NOW THE MAJOR ECONOMIC
AND POLITICAL FORCE IN THE AREA.

4. SCHMIDT'S ENDEAVORS IN THE FOREIGN POLICY FIELD
UNDOUBTEDLY CONTRIBUTED TO BOLSTERING HIS IMAGE AT HOME
OF A STRONG LEADER LOOKING OUT FOR GERMAN NATIONAL
INTERESTS. THERE ARE FEW BURDENS OF THE PAST WEIGHING
ON THE CHANCELLOR. HIS TIGHT-FISTED AND HARD-HEADED
APPROACH TO OSTPOLITIK HAS WON HIM PLAUDITS FROM ALL
EXCEPT THE LEFT WING OF THE SPD. IF ONE IS TO JUDGE
FROM REACTIONS IN BONN POLITICAL CIRCLES, SCHMIDT'S
OVERALL FOREIGN POLICY LINE HAS A GREAT DEAL OF GENERAL
SUPPORT. SHREWD OBSERVERS TELL US THAT IT IS HIS SORT
OF NO-NONSENSE, STRAIGHT-FORWARD, SOMETIMES ALMOST
ARROGANT, APPROACH THAT ATTRACTS MANY GERMANS, NOT
LEAST BECAUSE THEY HAVE FELT FRG FOREIGN POLICY IN
RECENT YEARS TO BE WEAK, OVERLY DEFENSIVE OR OVERLY
WILLING TO BUY ITS WAY OUT OF DIFFICULTIES.

5. FOR SCHMIDT THE FUTURE IS NOT WITHOUT SERIOUS
POTENTIAL PROBLEMS. UNEMPLOYMENT IS CONTINUING TO GROW
AND HAS NOW REACHED A LEVEL OVER 500,000 (A FIGURE MORE

SIGNIFICANT PSYCHOLOGICALLY IN THIS COUNTRY THAN IN ABSOLUTE TERMS). PRESSURE IS GROWING WITHIN SCHMIDT'S OWN SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY TO TAKE MEASURES TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM, AND THE 900 MILLION MARK PUMP PRIMING EFFORT OF SEPTEMBER 11 IS THE FIRST RESPONSE TO THIS PRESSURE. HE IS DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC/MONETARY SITUATION AND IS WELL AWARE THAT GERMANY, DESPITE ITS FAVORABLE CURRENT EXPORT POSITION AND LARGE MONETARY RESERVES, COULD NOT ESCAPE A MAJOR WORLD-WIDE ECONOMIC CRISIS, OR A COLLAPSE OF

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PAGE 03 BONN 14819 02 OF 03 190959Z

THE WESTERN EUROPEAN ECONOMY. HE IS FRUSTRATED BY THE SEEMING INTRACTABILITY OF CURRENT INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC PROBLEMS WHICH HE DESCRIBES AS DERIVING FROM A STRUCTURAL REVOLUTION IN THE WORLD ECONOMY, AND MUCH WORRIED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE ADVANCED WESTERN SOCIETIES. BUT IN TERMS OF HIS PERSONAL POLITICAL FUTURE, PROSPECTIVE ECONOMIC CRISES COULD AT LEAST FOR A TIME MAKE HIM SEEM MORE IRREPLACEABLE IN THE EYES OF THE GERMAN PUBLIC. HE IS AT HIS VERY BEST IN SUCH SITUATIONS.

6. THE SPD ITSELF IS ONE OF SCHMIDT'S MAJOR CURRENT HEADACHES. THE BRANDT-WEHNER CONFLICT, THE WIENAND-STEINER SCANDALS, AND PERSISTENT AND STILL UNANSWERED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE GUILLAUME SPY CASE'S RAMIFICATIONS, ARE SUBJECTING THE PARTY TO GREAT INTERNAL STRAIN. SCHMIDT HAS VERY CLEARLY AND DELIBERATELY KEPT AS MUCH DISTANCE AS POSSIBLE BETWEEN HIM AND THE VARIOUS EMBROGLIOS. HE MAY BE HOPING THAT, ONCE ALL THE DUST HAS SETTLED, BOTH BRANDT AND WEHNER AND THEIR RESPECTIVE ALLIES AND PROTEGES WILL BE SO DAMAGED IN THE PUBLIC EYE AND WITHIN THE PARTY THAT SCHMIDT WOULD FOR THE FIRST TIME EMERGE AS THE ONLY FIGURE WITH POWER AND RESPECT. THE PRESENT ASSESSMENT IN BONN, HOWEVER, IS THAT NEITHER SCHMIDT NOR THE SPD CAN AFFORD THIS SORT OF BLOOD-LETTING WITHOUT THE PARTY'S LOSING MUCH PUBLIC RESPECT AND, POSSIBLY, A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF VOTES IN UPCOMING STATE ELECTIONS. SINCE SCHMIDT'S INTEREST MUST BE TO PRESERVE HIS POSITIVE WINNER'S IMAGE, THIS IS NOT A WELCOME PROSPECT FOR HIM.

7. NOT UNRELATED TO THE SPD'S INTERNAL DIFFICULTIES IS THE PARTY'S STRAINED RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FDP, ITS COALITION PARTNER. MANY SPD MEMBERS STILL RESENT GENSCHER'S READINESS TO LET BRANDT TAKE THE ENTIRE BLAME FOR GUILLAUME'S ACTIVITIES, AND THE FOREIGN MINISTER IS AGAIN FEELING THE HEAT OF BRANDT'S INDIRECT CRITICISM OF HIS (GENSCHER'S) ROLE IN THE GUILLAUME AFFAIR. MORE-

OVER, SCHMIDT'S ONE-MAN SHOW, ESPECIALLY IN THE FOREIGN

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 BONN 14819 02 OF 03 190959Z

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BONN 14819 03 OF 03 191001Z

20

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 BONN 14819

POLICY FIELD, HAS LEFT GENSCHER INCREASINGLY BITTER. WHILE SCHMIDT SHOWS NO SIGNS OF SMOOTHING HIS SOMEWHAT GENERAL ABRASIVE APPROACH, IT SEEMS OBVIOUS THAT SOMETHING IS GOING TO HAVE TO BE DONE ABOUT SOOTHING
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PAGE 02 BONN 14819 03 OF 03 191001Z

GENSCHER'S BRUISED EGO, FOR SCHMIDT IS REALISTIC ENOUGH TO KNOW THAT A COMPLETE SPLIT WITH THE FDP CANNOT CONCEIVABLY BE IN THE SPD'S INTEREST AT THIS POINT. HIS STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF THE ROLE OF FOREIGN MINISTERS IN THE EEC DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IS COMPLETELY IN LINE WITH GENSCHER'S OWN VIEWS.

8. MY ASSESSMENT IS THAT SCHMIDT, WHO IS A CLEVER AND DETERMINED MAN, WILL PROBABLY BE ABLE TO DEAL IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER WITH MOST OF THE PROBLEMS NOW IN FRONT OF HIM. WITH A MODICUM OF GOOD SENSE AND SOME FAST FOOTWORK, HE SHOULD BE ABLE TO AVOID DISASTER IN THE INTERNAL SPD MESS AND IN THE SPD-FDP RELATIONSHIP. IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER COUNTRIES, GERMANY HAS MADE GOOD PROGRESS IN BRINGING INFLATION UNDER CONTROL AND SCHMIDT HAS GOTTEN MUCH OF THE CREDIT FOR THIS. IT WILL BE TRICKY, HOWEVER, TO GET THE ECONOMY MOVING AGAIN NEXT YEAR WITHOUT REKINDLING INFLATION. HIS OWN DEEP CONCERN (NOTED ABOVE) WITH WHAT HE SEES AS A CONSTANTLY DETERIORATING ECONOMIC SITUATION IN THE ECONOMIES OF THE INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES WILL CONTINUE TO BE A SOURCE OF PERSONAL FRUSTRATION, FOR HERE HE FEELS LARGELY AT THE MERCY OF FORCES AND OF SOURCES OF ENERGY SUPPLY BEYOND HIS EFFECTIVE CONTROL. WE CAN EXPECT HIM TO PRESS FOR INITIATIVES ON THE ECONOMIC/MONETARY FRONT, ESPECIALLY FROM THE U.S., IN THE PERIOD AHEAD, FOR HE SEES US AS THE KEY PLAYER IN ANY MEDIUM OR LONG-TERM SOLUTION. WHATEVER THE SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENTS IN THESE VARIOUS PROBLEM AREAS, HOWEVER, I SHOULD EXPECT SCHMIDT TO CONTINUE IN THE PERIOD AHEAD TO ASSERT HIS PREDOMINANT ROLE IN GERMANY AND IN EUROPE WHERE HE HAS EMERGED, DESPITE THE BREVITY OF HIS CHANCELLORSHIP, AS PERHAPS THE AREA'S MOST DYNAMIC AND SELF-ASSURED LEADER.

9. A WORD ABOUT SCHMIDT AND THE U.S. HIS RELATIONS WITH US MAY SOMETIMES BE DIFFICULT. HE MAY BE ABRASIVE WITH US AS HE IS WITH OTHERS, BUT HIS HEART

IS IN THE RIGHT PLACE. HE IS A CONVINCED FRIEND OF
THE U.S. EVEN IF SOMETIMES CRITICAL OF US FOR WHAT HE
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PAGE 03 BONN 14819 03 OF 03 191001Z

CONCEIVES TO BE OUR DISREGARD OF GERMAN AND EUROPEAN
INTERESTS. HE IS INTELLECTUALLY STRONGLY IN FAVOR OF
CLOSE US-EUROPEAN TIES, BUT HE WILL BE MORE ASSIDUOUS
THAN MOST PAST CHANCELLORS I IN PRESSING FRG
INTERESTS VIS-A-VIS THE U.S. ONE CAN PREDICT, THERE-
FORE, PERIODS OF PRICKLY RELATIONS BETWEEN US IN THE
PERIOD AHEAD. BUT SCHMIDT IS ABOVE ALL REALISTIC,
PRAGMATIC AND NON-IDEOLOGICAL AND HE KNOWS THAT IN THE
FINAL ANALYSIS HE AND THE FRG NEED THE U.S. IN THE
VITAL FIELDS OF SECURITY AND ECONOMIC/MONETARY POLICY.

10. A FINAL PROBLEMATIC ELEMENT IN THIS COMPLICA-
TED MAN WHO HAS EMERGED AS THE LEADER OF HIS COUNTRY
AT A CRITICAL POINT IS THE STATE OF HIS HEALTH. HE
HAS A CHRONIC THYROID CONDITION WHICH IS CURRENTLY
UNDER CONTROL, BUT THE POSSIBILITY CANNOT BE EXCLUDED
THAT UNDER THE PRESSURES OF OFFICE SOME RELAPSE MIGHT
OCCUR. GIVEN THE KEY POSITION WHICH HE HAS ALREADY
COME TO ASSUME IN EUROPE AND WILL INCREASINGLY, IN
MY VIEW, BE FORCED TO PLAY, ONE CAN ONLY EXPRESS HOPE
FOR HIS CONTINUED GOOD HEALTH.
HILLENBRAND

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